

APPOINTMENT WITH SEVEN

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PREFATORY NOTE

APPOINTMENT WITH SEVEN presents the first collection in book form of work by: Peter Chilvers, Max Chapman, Silvia Dobson, W. E. R. Bell and Mark Holloway.

Roger Burford makes his contribution in the "poems and documents" form he evolved for himself in his previously published book of poems. An acknowledgment is due to White and White for permission to reprint one poem from Roger Burford's *Poems and Documents*.

Oswell Blakeston and Max Chapman, Silvia Dobson and W. E. R. Bell, share sections as the editor feels that, in both cases, one poet contributes to the other.

Grateful thanks for permission to reprint some poems in this volume are due to the editors of the following publications: *Poetry Quarterly*, *Modern Reading*, Hogarth's *Poets Of Tomorrow*, *Poetry Folios*, *Little Reviews Anthology*, *New Roads*, *The New English Weekly*, *Life And Letters*, *Now*, *Gangrel*, *Cambridge Front*, *Outlook*, *Gen*, *The Westminster Magazine*, *New Vision*, *The Bookman*, *Seed*, Nancy Cunard's *Poems For France*, Harry Roskolenko's *Exiles' Anthology*.

Roger Burford

NEW POEMS AND DOCUMENTS

1.

Few more than a dozen poems in ten years! It is ten years nearly since in *Poems and Documents* I collected all the verse I had written between 1926 and 1936, because events seemed 'to warn the artist to tidy up while there was still time, make an inventory of work done. It might help to point out the work to do—the same work, or something else.'

Ten years rush by and one picks oneself up, apparently none the worse—and apparently none the better.

I ended up with a defence of the dream—not the dream as an escape but the dream as a reference back. Or forward. I wrote "What passes by my dream must meet my dream." A year elapses and in 1937 I am writing *The Untrusted Dream*, so apparently in those bewildering days for our country the poetic vision (the dream) wasn't getting any further. Then in 1941, with London on fire, my dream was met, and I wrote the lines I have now called *Light and Dark*.

In the meantime three poems between 1937 and 1940 reflect my interest in pacifism. But in these notes I am not concerned with a poet's opinions but with his attitude to the public. In *And now . . .*, *Dream of Reason*, and *Christ's Paradigm*, it was obvious that I had a statement to make and tried to make it logically and clearly.

I'm prepared to state that I've come to some definite views about the writing of poetry at the present time—that is if you agree that normally the poet *can't* write without a public as large as the society he spiritually lives in. I believe that in these days POETRY SHOULD BE WRITTEN WHICH CAN BE CARRIED IN THE HEAD. Its pleasure, its consolation, its support must be available currently during the day or night without much recourse to the bookshelf. It must accompany us to the desert, the office and in the aeroplane. Poetry must be stronger than our resistance to it, and, lying in our memory, force its way forward with a strength greater than our anxiety.

This is what I say now, and this is perhaps what I was feeling towards in such a poem as *And now . . .*, compared with *Audit*. And I may have been fumbling in this direction

in the pre-Chaucerian rhythms of *Dream of Reason*, because it is easy to confuse memorableness with simplicity. But I felt, and feel, that it is highly dangerous—if the aim is to extend the poet's public to the limit of his society—to fall back on archaic national decorations. No doubt the poet no more than the parliament can go much beyond the nation, but our literature did not become European, at least, by clinging to those swaddling bands, however charming. But the idiom of wide communication is still to find—I only suggest it would be helpful if poetry attracted the memory.

Do not disturb my dream
what passes by my dream I will not tell
what passes by my dream I recognise
I am not born yet, I will not be born

What passes by my dream must meet my dream

Do not disturb my dream
tell me no news
tell me no stories of life

when it meets my dream
the cow will jump over the moon.

(Reprinted from *Poems and Documents* 1936)

LIGHT AND DARK

The dance of sulphur feeds the rose,
the knee-bones rattle in the glass
from which the exaltation flows
to buoy the gleaming feet of brass.

The flaming houses burn with love,
the tunnels have their soft recess,
and gold is showered from above
to light the canyons of distress.

Only the twist of double strand
is strong enough to brace creation:
my dream is where I see the band
unwound; in dream's anticipation.

THE UNTRUSTED DREAM

The moon is not of this pattern . . .
So does it go
Sliding across the vision,
And the world, my world, hums;
The moon which I have lost.

What blinded me but my own hands.
My hands made this hut, these chains.
While the moon dipped round the earth.

But one night I shall see it again,
The moon and what other planet,
Unrecognised in the remote or cold, the untrusted dream.

AUDIT

Her body is a tax on what?
Mr Audit Clerk are your accounts up-to-date?
Her higher process, Mr Audit Clerk, should it rate
Or be an as-if-not?
Her body is a tax on what?

On the integrity of her man?
On his appreciation
Of what is and what is not?
On the howling people,
On the health, life, beauty of these children
So early old, children they are not.

The accountants are in
The clerks on their toes
Bring out their day-books
And polish their lies.

Some survey the heroic future of the ranged noughts and
leading ciphers,
Stern actuarial dictators;
Others hurry down formal corridors to posit a complexity.
Suddenly the high-collared boss smote the board table,
Miss Millington was quite nervous
And worried we all were
And everyone stopped.

GENTLEMEN, what are we talking about?
 Can you tell me what we are doing here?
 Are we on a long journey with camels
 Over the icy tundra?
 Are we slipping the knife into the asparagus bed and finding
 mushrooms?
 I am well aware that at this moment
 Aërial creatures are suffused with tender love.
 Heaven is not at all the figment you imagine.
 Oh, if only you would imagine it for a moment!
 If only you would throw off your usual caution
 To converse with angels!
 But perhaps we are in this office,
 Or are we not?
 Her body is a tax on what?

Gentlemen, it is a tax on all those items,
 I refer to your catalogue.
 But we have a formula for this occasion,
 I have found it in my own case very practicable.
 I made this formula in grief
 Regarding my tedious life
 And the similarity of all my days.

AND NOW . .

The sore news that breaks our hearts
 Has broken first those men
 Whose bare-hand courage raised our hearts
 But did not save those men.

Our need to die when others die
 To hold our hand to them
 Reveals we must do more than die
 To save ourselves and them.

THE DREAM OF REASON

How many still dreamed
 In those days of dwindling reason
 With the ratio falling
 Words put into camps?

In how many houses
 Was the dream-book holy,
 Men still having it
 That dreams stood on reason?

Without the meaning
 Their slumber is dreamless,
 Logs lying in featherbeds
 Till they get up to kill.

Beasts have discourse,
 They speak reason;
 But these lolled wordless
 In the void of that night.

Then arose all those dead men
 With their perished heart-strings
 And slaughtered the dreamers,
 Yes, the dead slew the live!

This was wonder,
 Reason stretched her armour
 Summoned her recruitment,
 For each casualty ten.
 This is what we saw
 And shall see again.

CHRIST'S PARADIGM

Little Lord Jesus in this woeful time
 What would be your paradigm?
 To you and to your family
 Love is the word I say to thee.

Christ Prophetic in this puzzling time
 What will be the paradigm?
 To you and the community
 Love is the word I say to thee.

Christ Lord Justice in this and every time
 What remains the paradigm?
 To you and all humanity
 Love is the word I say to thee.

Jesus Christ, in Herod's time
Was that the paradigm?
To you and to your phantasy
Death is the word I say to thee.

ANDREA

Andrea my adopted daughter
What is your affected name?
A Greek man lurks, a Scotsman also
And half a mis-spelled queen of England.
What a riddle ready for you
Born in times when black and white
Spin about, and all is shabby.

In such times the hero always
Writes his own name in the scroll,
Born again with other parents
Still the real birth is your own one
When from out your own long thigh
You step the heroine of life to-morrow
To choose a name and never die.

II.

From midsummer 1943, for two years, I was in Moscow. What a wonderful opportunity to write about England. However I was too busy to write about anything. All the same here are two poems of mixed nostalgia—*Written in Moscow* and *Inhabited Places*. No profound problems of public and communication arise—only practical problems. I did want, for instance, to communicate a precise feeling about England and Russia to my Russian and English friends and consequently *Written in Moscow* was composed synchronously in the Russian and English languages, though I hardly knew enough Russian to order my breakfast. Many willing friends helped me with case-endings, and even more. Some of the lines in Russian sound good to me. I can't print here a translation into Russian of one of my more secretive and mystical poems which a Russian who was not a writer of any sort did for me without fuss and with apparent success—I mention it so that I can remark that the interest in metrical composition is far more widespread in the Soviet

Union than it is here—as widespread as it was among the middle-class here when my mother and father were young—say, the eighteen seventies and eighties.

People who know Russian literature well may be shocked at the selection of poems I chose to translate. They were, I should explain, those which were thrust in front of me by my Soviet friends. I don't suppose it's a typical cross section of what ordinary people call their favourites—it is the kind of selection that might crop up in an evening's desultory conversation. There is *Who Knows?* a popular gramophone ballad, a poem of Simonov's,* which to be more typical should have been a nostalgic lyric from the front, Gumilev's *Turkey*—Gumilev was a fellow-traveller who was shot in 1921: his work is no longer printed, but individuals remember it for its felicity of style which reminds them of Kipling, whom they admire: a few lines from the subtle Akhmatova, the Acmeist poetess who was able to continue with honour into the new age: and finally one from Lermontov. I have included this although the translation is quite frankly awful because no evening's foraging among the Russian poets would be complete without an example from the classics. My difficulty was that the classical writers mostly wrote at a length formidable to a student who was tied to a dictionary.

The translations are faithful, not new poems. I can't yet see what information they yield on the poet-public theme, but they give me a chance of remarking that, apart from Shakespeare and Byron, Burns and Kipling are the two best known and admired of our poets in the Soviet Union.

*THE CHRISTMAS TREE. The Soviet Christmas Tree is of course a New Year tree, but my children who attended many of them in Moscow in the winter of 1944–5 didn't notice the difference. Santa Claus was Father Frost, but he had the same useful sack.

WRITTEN IN MOSCOW

There is no flower like the rose
There are no children like mine;
There is no flower like the columbine;
There is no flower like the iris, the blue iris,
There is none like the yellow one.

There are no people like the people of the Russian land,
None like the English.
Comparison bewilders only.
And to my eyes there seem
No rivers like the Russian rivers,
None like my village stream.

INHABITED PLACES

There was a party for ski-ing overnight
But several were asleep in the morning
And then the snow wasn't right.
We went out in the local electric train
To an inhabited place.
In the market they were selling lemons.
We sat on a bridge to drink champagne
With our carried lunch.
People said 'Why do you sit in the snow
When there are occupied houses where you can go?'

Amersham is also an inhabited place
And in England there are parties overnight
And across the Chilterns
An afternoon light
Of lemons, champagne and snow.

WHO KNOWS ?

From the sunset comes a fellow
Strolling past my cottage door
And his eyebrows speak their language
But he parleys nothing more.
Who knows, without trying,
Who it was he was eyeing?

When I went upon an outing
He would dance and sing quite gay,
But on parting at the wicket
Only sigh and turn away.

Who knows, without trying
For whom he was sighing?

So I asked 'Why aren't you happy?
Don't you think that life is fine?'
'It's my suffering heart,' he answered,
'I have lost this heart of mine.'

Who knows without trying
Just where it was lying?

Then mysteriously two letters
Were delivered yesterday.
For his wishes—dots and dashes,
Can you guess? he seemed to say.
Who knows without trying
What he was implying?

Well, I didn't stop to puzzle,
Don't expect to hear the rest,
For my heart somehow or other
Melted softly in my breast.

Who knows without trying
For whom it's complying?

Translated from Isakovski.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Animals in velvet
Rabbits parading,
Playthings for the children—
The Christmas Tree's lading.

Far and wide the children
As the years go on creeping
Look for the Christmas Tree,
To the death ever seeking.

Where fire-birds are perching
And gold bubbles darkling
On the tree they are searching
Happiness is sparkling.

But there's no Father Christmas
From the summit perceiving
To hand down the presents
That answer their grieving.

Fall the yellow needles
To the foot of the tree,
I am waiting only
To be handed down thee.

Translated from Simonov.

THE TURKEY

Unquiet, the dawn brings recollection
Of colours on a dappled sward
Where deep installed in my affection
There reigned a haughty turkey lord.

And there in wicked freedom reigning
In crimson wattles he appears
So superciliously disdainful
My insignificant four years.

No caramels or currant cake
No lemonade or chocolate cream
Could any consolation make
Or touch my consciousness of shame.

Again there comes the deep distress
Of childhood's shame and childhood's grief;
From you, adored in wickedness,
A scornful 'no' is answer brief.

But life is shifting, and awhile
There passes love and pain somehow—
And I remembering shall smile
At you, as at that turkey now!

Translated from Gumilev.

"WE THOUGHT WE WERE BEGGARS . . ."

We thought we were beggars, that we nothing had;
But when one to another loss we came to add
So each day was a wake,
We came to make
Songs of the great charity of God
And of the riches once we had.

Translated from Akhmatova.

WEARY AND DREARY

How weary and dreary to think that there's no one on earth
To help in a soul-felt depression.

Desire, everlastingly futile desire—what's it worth?

With the years, all the best of the years, in progression.

To love? Tell me whom. For a time? It's not worth the
pains.

Eternal love isn't our measure.

Perhaps you will glance at yourself: of the past, what
remains?

So little we reckon its sorrow and pleasure.

And passion? No—sooner or later that sweetest disease

Declines at a word of sweet reason,

For life, when you coldly reflect, look around where you
please,

Is only a very poor jest out of season.

Translated from Lermontov.

III.

Post-war, post my visit to Moscow, one poem only. It is too recently written for my comment. Instead I want to repeat that poetry, if it is to get out of books, should appeal to the memory. My rule would apply even to long narrative verse which has, in the past, thrown up passages of this sort. These passages, intruding on the memory, evoke the unremembered whole, its tone and atmosphere. This attitude to style is something the poet can do in preparation for the large public—if you agree that poetry can have a function not exhausted by the novel, the film and the song-lyric. I am not sure that the existence in the Soviet Union of a broad

poetry-reading public should kid us that the emergence of such a public is inevitable. There was a fairly broad one here too, for Tennyson, Browning and the hymnologists, when at a certain stage of the industrial revolution the luxury of culture was suddenly more widely dispersed and before the American age offered its distractions. Of course the statistical poet cannot be expected to bear the whole brunt, and until he receives say five hundred pounds for a sonnet he is hardly likely to spend all the labour it takes upon the problem of communication—for this is the problem. Poets have nothing to communicate which is not also within people.

EXCURSIONS

Oh, four sad strange men took me by the hand
To town's limit, towards the pit:
And we went in Sunday blue along land
Where overfed kale blackbirds sit:
They took me thirdly down fairy glen:
Brown water reached a fat girl's waist—
The fourth excursion then?
To town centre back I haste.

Oswell Blakeston and Max Chapman

THE ARROGANT MAN

For sheer cussed arrogance
Take the magician who
Ordered a port
And
Forthwith
Under the very eyes of the barman
Turned it into a sherry
And
Straightaway
In one draught
Drank it.

SPECTATOR

On a darkly troubled sea
Beneath a slate-dark sky,
I watched a little ship that sped
Crew of lighted candles.

Once I saw within a ball
A world of laundered white,
And through the snow a woman sped
Dark with unlit candle.

ANTI-FREUD

Last night I dreamt the tiger at your throat
But none shall name a murder in my heart,
I measured grief to deepen joy
That you so radiantly shall live today.

PROBLEM

Detective who found
A heart by the window,
Where is the mystery?
Call that a clue?

CORYBANTIC

Who is my constant companion,
the running whisper at my heel?
Who is the one who wakes me
with Do you sleep? and How do you feel?

He is a song without words
or music. He is an empty floor.
Clock astride my ear-drum
to drip the honey-comb of war.

Who is the one who wakes me
with Day is finished : sink or swim?
He is the demonologist
trying to decide what's wrong with him.

THE ENEMY

Nothing that Time will not cure, they say,
But will Time cure Time that way?
For here I sit till the mystic day
When I myself will be nothing.

THIS MACHINE AGE

Cinema at last invades my sacred moments,
Now your face drifts, isolated, screen projected;
Silkful strings sing softly when you bat your eyelids,
Thoughts are gangsters shod with skis who cross the
mountains
To break the law, the mysteries.

SKIN TIDES

Bring me where the free flesh cleaves
From the cloth the prurient weaves,
Cleaves as the kernel from the husk.
Shed me your mast!

Sea of two setting moons and hulk
Of the swaying ribs you've sunk,
I'll swim for your honey like a bee
Under white sea.

Bring me where the flesh cleaves from the shore
Where the lip waves withdraw,
I'll jump from your hempen beach and swim
With a following skin!

GOOD NEWS FOR SLOW TRAVELLERS

Once
while Heaven moved
as millstone across the Earth
Rulers held the names of Birds,
The Dark Bird Master
and The Green, Carnation Bird Master;
Law appointed,
harmonised,
while Sages studied shadows
of Turtles on the moon.

Now most is left undone
of all that once was done.

Yet from a far province
a teacher of the Nine Heavens
writes that at the waning of the moon
still the brains of fish grow small
and at the new moon still
shells of oysters shrink together.

YOUR NAME

A page came at the morning hour
a silver tube to slip between
the soft closed lips,
to wake his lord with taste
of honey drops and milk:

And so I wake, my dear with just
your name upon my lips.

THE VEINS OF LOVE

Only place your eye
Behind each separate screen,
Peer where each separate self
Takes sight of things unseen.

The misanthrope, the lover,
Each plots his vanishing point
Where lives cross one another
And worlds to his sun are bent.

These are open casements.
Lean from each sooty sill,
Like probing branches spreading
The veins of love will fill.

SECURITATI PERPETUÆ

Cupids and garlands tumble on church bones,
Cracked, lichened, silted and sinking;
Alas Immortality bought by Love's saving,
Behold the funeral hour of the gravestones.

MEMO

I have been asked to remember
young eyes of a sailor
in France

 You gave your lashes
 to your dear friends

I have been asked to remember
white nights in cafés
the little cafés

 May all your drinks
 come true

I have been asked to remember
Tomorrow to wonder if ever
we may no longer

 Be cast into prison
 for jail breaking

I have been asked to remember
one town's death or long division victory
and I would remember
my secret compositor
his news

 That any human hand may set
 the headlines of a heart

NIGHT FRUIT

One death
 for each known petal;
five of blood
 and five of metal.

Pick, till day
 lets mutely fall
a fanwise curtain
 for her pall,

and springly love treads
 round the bend
to an utter and
 insidious end.

For each known petal
 each known death—
and a moth-measure
 of shrunken breath.

BLACK OUT

Night was a Prince who carried water in a sieve, sifting rain
into invisibility, shaking it in sudden splashes on the unseen
next-door garden between the moments of silence when the
earth was a round pebble to the Flat Earthists.
The unseen garden, the leaves, the grass, the fern, the tendril,
the clutch of vegetable hands, these are as forgotten as the
name they went by in the catalogue of love.
For the man condemned to listen to suburban rain, Night is
but a black bag carrying the things that fail to heal, and the
Prince is now a death that would hurt terribly.

AS THE DAY IS

Let us pretend that waking
Is not the night's pretence . . .

Let us rest from sleeping
Wear a brief night of day
The quick dream fitting
The shape of our sinews' loving,
So live while we may.

Let us pretend that waking
Is not the night's pretence . . .

Let us return the staring
Of the enormous eye
Taste the co-enduring
Of male love and female warring
So live while we die.

GROTTO

This grass for you;
I have measured it to your thigh.

These little stones for you,
All over the ground.

This night under trees
Was made for you.

The shadows that slip like trout
In the air for your covering.

Ferns under my single shape are sour,
Ferns were made for you.
This wind of love,
This cave of longing for you . . .

PLEASURE CRUISE

Awful as love's knowledge
when love is over
each night of that long voyage
we four played poker.

Fearful without love
without the minus
of friendship's half-way promise,
to learn the clockwork of another's
mind and pulse and stratagem.

Four demons
about that ship's green table.

STRING QUARTET

Two men
two women
in music conversing,
speaking
ultimate truth
each to each:

Two men
two women
instruments packing,
departing—
"Such wretched weather,
isn't it?"

SPRING

Trams come boozing down the tracks
Heavy with shag and bowler hats.

Boys come whipping down the dust
Hankies in a sudden gust.

Pretty lamb and ugly sheep
Boys and bowlers never meet,

NOVICE

Lips, ah lips of merry red :
Halo tonsure for your head.
Lips to deny the pious taper,
Little bud in a screw of paper !

Lips that kiss Abbatial rings—
Icy fruit of seventeen Springs.
Pretending folds that bind in oath
And blanche your hidden stems of growth.

Ah, stand there foolish youth, and say
You do not rue the chanting day !
Or that you burn no sweeter essence
Than the sadly swinging incense !

Lips to shape a lover's whispers
Sigh the honeyed words of Vespers—
Sighs that sink to muted prayers
And carnal thoughts on draughty stairs . . .

Ah little bud, from Abbey's arch
Step back into your body's church !

SIAMESE CAT

Stray'd from a sleepy tiger-ridden palace
Bleached by a sun the size of elephants
You steal the shadow of a Rousseau fern from Paris
To demonstrate that jungle life has elegance.

CAT

Drugged cocoon
hatch me your buried paws !
Sun
steals the drool and dust
of your folded tune.
Still
as pillows breathe
you burst your brown.
Time is a saucer
watched
by the chiselled fur of ears.

MAN AND BEAST

The old man and
the Siamese cat
side by side
in the garden sun.

Paws, folded under, chest prowed over,
the aged cat looks
like a ship's figurehead rippling
through sun water.

Over, under,
look where you may,
the old man-sailor is,
so obviously is going
nowhere ;
past,
the waters foreign or sweet,
finished.

CONTENTMENT
(To Mister Mayor)

Dream of milk that clouds his eyes,
Cat's chin drips
At edge of chair, upholstered fur,
Fire flame tips
Paws as warm as red hot pies;
Mounou, a reason or two to purr?

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

In my heart there lives a cat,
There also lives a mouse;
Dears, perhaps you all can guess
The peace within my house.

GIPSY

My food is in the roots
Of ferns, of hair, of you;
My food is found where most
Eat the penultimate fear;
The immortelles that die on your breast
Are sign of the trust
That you and I will be fed—
Skeletons of maiden hair.

SUN IN THE SOUTH

A funeral procession does not stop at the grave
But winding back through years collects
The things we have remembered of the dead
Until the coffin carries full corpse cargo:
The shadow of a gnat he saw with Helen
When they harassed hands in station room
Behind the milk cans and the cloak
Of street he swung from drunken shoulders that
Swaying night with Paul. Ah, anchor of reality!
That common object of the countryside,
The gibbet. Friends, drag my legs to terminate
My sufferings on this scaffold.

IN SECRET

Honey bird lures on the hunters and
Tricks them to tree of a snake,
So that the bees busy may build wax
Chapel for bow of the God:
Bow stringed with taut line of bees
For that His arrow may sting less
Sweet.

SLIGHT TORSO

See how the flesh is blown
Like silent morning snow across the crevices of bone.

Then see below the gull-wing bone
Shoulder to shoulder flown
A boy's landscape.

His belly is a gently drifted dune
Which, under some passing moon,
A spirit dented
With a single footstep printed,
That no wind has deleted.

Or see it as a manuscript under-scored
Pure gold or gold that tarnish mellow,
Haloed.

FAIR ENOUGH

Because you have repulsed the god at his appearances
I will not fold my wings round you
and I am Death.
I will pluck you out with my teeth
and spit you into darkness;
You shall not know my wings,
You shall not know my arms,
because you have repulsed the god.

CENTRAL HEAT
or
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS

All night poor Nero played
And Rome a furnace;
No other way to keep
His dying heart warm.

STILL LIFE

Venerable as in a dream
I count the pleasures of my life;
Vulnerable as if awake
I find the treasures of my death;
Plum veined pips of vintage love,
The cloud of solitude, the dove.

COUNTRY SHOT

The backdoor slopes into the sea,
No Hawkers, No Circulars, No Mermaids;
The Cottage of Cloud and plates unwashed
While sheep-dog, grey chrysanthemum,
Bites through his chain till teeth are worn
And bones laid bare,
And the woman plays the gramophone
Which magics the slut to remember when
The boy said, "Dear
To embrace you is to hold
All Summer in my arms."
The gramophone whirls in the Cottage of Cloud,
In the Cottage of Cloud and the plates unwashed.

COUNTRY AT SPRING

Thrush nests in a gas mask,
the black holes of her visor
are eggs she'll lay for sightless men—
the brood she'll hatch—
and tiny feet aside to push their tents
of grass with fear the moving blade's betrayal,
small prudent whiskers must confront
a hawthorn barricade:
there to drop
the smallest tears of blood.

In the green arm pit twist curls of oak
propose an ambush:
trout to spawn
improve the gurgling sweat with mines:
small wonder
under grazing horns
there is no stare of milk
only the time set scare-curds.

CIGARETTE

This is as far as the band comes
From this point drummers bear stretchers
("In two hours we move up the line")
Each man alone with his head cupped
Between hands wrenched from their discipline
Each man before the eternal
Sitting alone with his head bent
Rain falls across silence while mud
Emptily sucks at the landscape
This is as far as the band comes

LAST DAY

The world a photographic negative,
The last breath frosts the trembling narrative. . .

CONTRAST

It is so silent
 where the fountain is noisy,
 It is so silent
 in the courtyard
 through which men tramp,
 It is so remote
 on benches
 near the fountain
 where many jostle and stare,
 There is more tumult in the deserted house
 when I lie silent
 in the arms of a casual lover.

LITTLE SAGA

"As high as a house
 gales piled it up
 on the beaches;
 Four horses it took
 to draw each cart
 of weed
 from the sea;
 Ah, we shovelled under Earth
 high Air of tempest,
 deep juice of Waters,
 and Fire too
 from the beasts who drew
 the brine heavy cargo—
 their fiery breath;
 Yes, as tall as a house
 mounds quivering
 on land awaiting new history,
 moving as if alive, teeming
 with black plated insects."

WINTER SOWING

Empty valley, one
 Intricate flower,
 One bloom escaped
 From some forgotten garden.
 Escape?

Last night
 In the dark wind I felt
 Against my cheek the seeds
 Of Lads' Love, Lady's Bedstraw.

THUMBNAIL

Night is a sharpened pencil shading in
 The planes and deep recesses of its sky,
 A hand that will presently scratch in
 A cold whistle of stars.

Busy the morning that erases!
 A loaded brush to flood its page
 With the warm song of near
 And coloured clouds.

TRYST

The plantain was a girl who waited
 For her absent friend,
 Dear God, He changed her so that she
 Grows by every road;
 Kind God, for surely now this weed-girl
 She must find her lover?

HOW IT GOT THERE

Something awful in the garden
 (Adam's garden, God's footfall)
 Made the early Wall Flower scramble
 To the top of Eden's wall.

AS THE HEART IS

Here in this grave of forgetting
We have buried the hour,
Forgetting the grave
Shutting the door.

Forgetting the door has opened
To a draught of stars,
We under our shroud
They in theirs.

Forgetting there is a moment
When we remember
Worlds within worlds,
Member in member.

ON SUNDAY

She put on her new mackintosh
To go down to the quay
To drown herself that afternoon
In the rain-whipped sea.

CHANGE OF HEART

Unless ye cease to be
As little children
Unless ye cease to be innocent
Of a sense of guilt
Unless ye cease to pull
The cat's tail of Righteous Wrath,
Verily ye shall not enter the manhood of love,
War without end, Amen.

COLOUR NOTE

My blue
bird has a black
eye.

POEM

They tread the grape with tom-tom eyes
Under the rising of my hill—
They, the fell passengers of centuries,
Are still
Unmuted in the maze
Of predatory whos and whys,
Still laugh the boycott of their days.

Under the falling of my pulse
I fumble with their slings and bows.
Buds in the autumn are my valse
To close
The gala and the feast,
To propagate the proud or else
Bequeath the vineyard to the beast.

THE GLOVE OF SKIN

She saw my shade,
She dived again
Into the quiet sea,
And grey cloud blood came staining up
On the water's skin.

My dear, my dear, don't bleed to death,
Come back, come back to the seaweed strand,
I'll leave your glove, the glove you dropped
Between the sea and land.

CRI DE COEUR

Oh
work
should be a rest from rest!
Not rest
a rest
from work!

PROGRESS

Children of
Light;
Afraid of the
Dark.

CONFESSIONAL

Ah, as in God is my belief in you
Your foot's anger shaking my stair.

So. Must you linger, then,
In heavenly mansions? Come, my creed,
Between these sheets
I will crush the holy ghost of you . . .

INNOCENCE

Grains of mice, scarcely a hint,
Play in bed of fine Catmint,
Baby shrews, learning no lesson
For the Tiger Lilies' season.

Peter Chilvers

TAKE NO LOVE

He came to me
As a shadow falls over summer,
And his fire burnt in me,
As snow hisses in the ears of dogs, naked
To the wind of the meadow.

Such a one was he
With all the violence of a tideless sea,
Such a storm that over the guileless rocks
Breeds the wildest storms in me.

Kisses are common things,
The priests of privacy before the fall,
Our groping love is vulgar, like
A tampering finger in water-flowers,
And our eyes are too gentle.

O how he fell and worshipped with his long silences,
Coming from the north through the darkest lanes,
From the forests where his trees were, broken
By many knives and the myths of his love.

His lips did not touch mine,
But whispered only,
As trees brush warmer than the sun in the autumn air.

Now that the sweetness, taken, hides as a
Stranger from all eyes but his,
Now I know
That the wind, the sunshine of his wandering, blows
Over him somewhere,
Reaching the ruffled lanes as he would have wished,
I do not dream of passion, or
Dread the flowers he loved, that grow
So strongly now in every field.

Memories have walked without desire,
None of my tears would hide the pain,
Now that his shadow over summer is larger than my fear,
I do not dare to hope that he'll come back again.

EVENING DEVOTIONS

No night closes without the sun's death melting the moon,
And the evening collapses over us like a mountainous cloud,
A night that burrows to the heart of dusk, to the caverns
where our souls

Ask impossible blessings and receive less with holy heads
bowed.

Out across the belly of the sky move the stars,
The souls of us all, and sheeps' bells chafe our heels
And the chains of the love in us rattle against the smallest
hills,

And are red with the blood of us, with the virtuous
wandering of our lusts in the fields.

Thus we and our blasphemous tears ride that high road,
And take with us desires of the dust and the shape of our
crumbling selves,

And the lamps of our lovers guide us to our glad graves,
To the forests of the meek and the poor and the holy and
those much afraid.

Night closes on our hearts and the withering moon waylays
our wistful hopes,

And down to the river go our dreams and the shadows of
our souls,

To that breach in our terror through which we see from
the dust

A waterfall and a vision of our lust and a compelled cross.

TO A GREAT FRIEND

So I have spoken of you, and not
Seen you but the image, the blur, of you,
The pain and the infinite, the scourge and the satiety,
The chastity of your heart,
And the gutters of its pleasure.

And I would not be less ready, as now
Some think of you less pleasantly, less definitely,
As some think more passionately and wildly,
As some think endlessly to have you all,
As some do and have and are all.

I have seen, from the casualness of my shade,
The part that did not possess them, nor them that,
Of the hope they never had, which you had not,
Which you, secretly, made public to them,
The stole of the cloak encircling you.

As I have seen, few things have so utter narrowness,
Few things that are so generous,
You are not these, not hers, you are not his, nor mine,
You are not you on your knees, nor clasped, nor kissed.

Such things sleep by the water,
And are nourished by less than the fire of themselves,
And are gone within the month to another nature.

You are not what you are, nor as they, nor as her,
Where the soul is a lie you are fire,
You are your own treasure expended, and they
Enjoy the splendour.

LOVE SONG

Kiss me that I may be kissed again,
And listen to your heart and hear your voice,
Weave the magic that will hide my pain
By whispers in my ear, whilst you rejoice
My love, that kisses can obtain
More laughter than the soul provides,
And sleep that only deepest dawn divides.

I will love you as you ask,
And be your hour, your running life,
Give me your kisses on my mouth
And I'll not wish to be your wife.

Only see one hour does not run out
With rumours that the night cannot defend,
Or pass with kisses to harsh words' poor end,
Where lips speak lies that love has turned about.

Kiss me that I may be yours always,
Although the jealous months would yet deprive,
I'll be the maiden of your watchful days,
All yours and with your kisses all alive.

DECEMBER POEM

Please do not say you have no love for me,
And use not caution if you have a care,
Life here is harder than the love I leave you there.

Draw no blind across the narrow skies,
For thus our skies are not the sun grown higher,
Least have a bench for my one prayer,
Lest any pain we cannot share together.

Please do not say you were not there,
Or are not here,
The eyes that cry
When death is nearer than the narrow sky,
May yet be yours
And mine
Just the far-off beckon of a star when the night is fine.

O love, come clearer than the cloudy moon,
Be mine, though you say not, for the dawn breaks soon,
And snow on earth that hides no peace
Will freeze our love to the nodding trees,
Or give to a star
That warmth you gave me beside the fire.

EPITAPH

That was nothing, the way he looked and said the things he
said,
Or held my hands and stroked my head,
They were nothing, all the things he promised, the things
I did,
Abandoning myself to mute inquiry, to my love.

To all that came I gave, to all he asked I gave,
Spring had blossoms, leaves held autumn in the wind,
All he wished I wished, all he never had he had,
All I gave I gave with eyes and hands and love,

All that was nothing, now is less than London in the rain,
Or starving sparrow fallen from the nest,
Less than private hate in sober streets,
Or some man's child that's lost,
It was nothing how I came to him, how he
In winter plucked the leaves from boughs and broke the
tree,
And burnt the bush and spread my love across its misery.

That was nothing, our strange parting in the dusk, the
darkening wood,
All those were blind-flower prints of all the flower was,
The gifts of love, words wise and wild, those from my
heart, are dust,
The paltry dust of dreams misunderstood.

TWILIGHT

Come again
Twilight, long gone,
Come again
Dusk in warm lane,
Warm lips, warm heart, warm hand.

Twilight understands
Hope and fire on hands,
And bends
Rivers to your gardens,
Dusk and shade
Have made
Lovers in the dark,
And sped the lark
Home to loving in the glade.

Twilight redeems
Town and street,
And the grace of feet
On the strand,
And the wand
Of evening thrills the streams.

Come again
The moon's shine
The lamps' line
And the swing of stars
Up their blue stairs.

Come again
Twilight, long gone,
And dusk's wind
On the day's rain,
And night on
The fool's face again.

THE RIVER

Have you reached the river yet, my friend,
Beneath the brow
Of summer's scorn,
Beside the corn
Of April's sowing, the fallow
Land of unforgetting.

Have you reached the river yet, my friend?
Above the blow
Of wind and rain,
Above the pain
Of tears and those tears' end
With the sun setting.

Have you reached the river yet, my friend?
Behind the rose
That's weighted by the briar,
Has yet the liar
Heart shown what its years intend,
What new loving.

Have you seen the river yet, my friend?
Seen the honey and the run
Of autumn to a wiser man,
Has summer's plan
Reached the river where its waters bend
To all love's giving.

When you reach the river, friend,
Bend down,
And in the quivering amber green
Watch unseen
Love's birth, as water from the river's end
Floats down to all the meadow's breathing,
Where love's a lane
From the eye's belief to the heart's believing.

RAIN

Rain soaks the sodden sameness of his
Face,
Storming the obedient blood that claims his
Heart,
Stirring the stained leaves that lie beneath his
Head,
Drowning the stones that mark his last blind
Rest,
Dropping through the dripping trees like autumn leaves
grown

Old with sun.

It was autumn when he last was home.

He saw when he died no woods or trees swamped with rain,
Nor any sun that over the green hills cleared
The fierce air,
When he looked long night had fallen
Over pain
And death was mud that clogged his violent hair.

Say it was brown earth that buried him,
And squirrels in their gathering season, with
Beeches full of promise for their drowsy year,
That found him fondled by the listless rain,
And keep him there.

Not the tired men that dug a pit beside the
Damp lane,
And on a crooked cross scraped his own
Strange name.

WHAT IF YOU SHOULD DISCOVER

What if you should discover
The angels in her arms or uncover
Beggars in her ways,
What if the days
End and the years are toil and the rain
Enter and your love bring tears again?

What if you should find
In your heart an old cancer, a blind
Regret and a drab fear,
What if you are afraid to hear
music and laughter in case her eyes
Remind you of her greatness and your lies.

What if you should unturn
The damp page, the letter and burn
Those ready words with your honour,
You might look upon her
And discover in your days the worst dream,
Her love's end and you as you have been.

MY LADY

She is the casual spirit,
In whose careless eyes hides the bitterness of meekness dying.

She is the tale and truth of travellers,
Who have journeyed across plains and passed between
mountains and talked with the world in strange
inns.

She is a symbol of fine dust,
Whose clouds are the products of a waste fertility, who
sow the tender sides of soft hills with wind-
needles and shut off the sun from the woods
above the green villages.

She is the shape and sound of a faint track into the forest,
Which breaks quickly and quietly through the bush-tangles
and flows like a shadow through the dark trees
to the black screens of bank before the great
river.

She is leaf from a small tree,
Whose young branches cramp against the barks of great
timbers, strained by the high walls to small
heavens, where the tortures fly that are the
fortunes of the unformed.

She is the blue moon of the lost rivers,
Who shines upon the grey waters of the sad streams and
lights with leaf-candles the branches of the lean
trees and cools the bare toil of the sun upon the
hollow land.

She is the fruit and freshness of the terrace,
Blown on by the winds of the quiet forests, tilled by an age
that has kindled silence in its green bosom and
grown rich graces from the moisture of the four
seasons.

She is soft rain upon the mountains,
Who clouds with mist-orange the slopes of steep hills and
drips damply through the leaves of tall trees and
stirs the sulky dust of autumn beneath the swollen
branches.

She is the whip of dalliance,
Loitering in the red valley till the sun sets and the breezes
rise that are the flush of evening and the stars
hover that are the larks of twilight.

She is the goddess of springs,
In her gardens the wildest flowers colour the walls that are
the pillars of heaven,
Where the grasses fall from beside the clear water the deep
forest breathes with the fast pulse of summer
and leaves from the spring-bushes vow autumn
mating when the next gale blows.

She is the spirit of the silent forests,
 Travellers will know her for she is in these things,
 The sad shadow of the glade is her sorrow and the gay
 rustle of the leaves is her careless laughter,
 We do not know of her bitterness for this she has hidden
 in the trail of the summer wind,
 For she knows that we favour this, sleeping in its path when
 the sun is high and the snow gone from the
 tops of the mountains.

SIMON, CALLED PETER

As rain falls so the shattered flags shall fall,
 And the shutters of the heart break,
 Rank on rank of tended palm trees waste,
 And Israel, lost in sand, shall not arise
 To claim the honey in its promised land.

So I, disciple, have been promised more than this,
 And nourished more hope than all the world,
 And she held it, holds it now, in the palm of her hand.

I have seen all that time can do, has done,
 I have watched the shadows setting in her eyes, and
 Lived for years in a hovel beneath the mountains of her sun,
 I have crept alone through amazing mists to the temple of
 her grace,

And finding there one altar, one young cross, carved
 My name on it,
 And shuffled back to my proper place.

As rain falls and breaks the roses, blows the acrid lilies
 down,

I have more time to lose than fire to use for baking,
 Time that hangs on my hands as the crucifix below her face,
 Time to watch the burning seas, broken and defeated at the
 Heart of the shiftless sand,
 Time to toss my rosary aside, the ash of an unlit fire,
 To walk alone as a legend chooses along the beach of love.

Faithfully, as Simon should, I have kept the altar,
 And come across the place of each heart,
 Each heart that ever loved another,

And I have found there one altar as before, one cross of
 grace,
 And one image on the psalter, one loved face,
 I discovered only the brokenhearted go unheeded,
 And those whose wisdom makes friend of every man.

I have carved on each heart my own name,
 I have watched in Time for my own sign, for the flame
 Of my own love.

As rain fell I saw her sun dying, killed by the clouds,
 And I wandered away as I have always done,
 To see the world claim its own,
 And, in the rain, to watch for the sun again.

THE ENIGMA

Some will love her and the enigma,
 And the sorrowful demeanour of her better nature,
 Some will apprise a more gallant storm within her,
 More chivalrous than I confront,
 And will be a source of pleasure.

I shall live as long as my love lives, it is hers,
 For I can make much of this weather,
 The downpour of the unready spirit in her.

Live long and tell her, spirit, of the never begotten touch of
 her,

The conceived host of awkward chastities,
 Smile at the leisure of her ways, the sloth of her heart,
 And pity the youth of her torment,
 And provide a soft pleasantry as her answer.

It must come, the gay surrender and the broken denial,
 The eve of shame, the night of the heart's fasting,
 Within her are harboured in delight
 The vague stir of things that have not been stirred,
 The vessels laden that have not departed,
 The dreams undreamt that have yet to be ventured.

She will have in those days of her heart
Hopes full of some praise,
And a grace that is born of the fear within,
Some will love her, as the sun this meadow,
Or I her shadow,
And will of their charity ride out the high winds,
And share the answer with her when the storm is past.

HER

The unseen eyes appear
In the distress of a murmur, in
The caress
Of wheat in a drowsy ear.

A lover is aware
Of a tear in the light rain, of
A fear
That clouds will gather.

So I have in my mind
Gardens for the poor blind,
With their flowers in her hair,
And summer there a rose all the year.

She seems to arise
From a deep fever,
Like a leaf to the bough,
And my eyes believe her
As immortal as the stars worn
Between sunset and dawn.

SEÑORITA

You have seen
In lights and lanterns,
Fulsome meaning in harmless things,
Seen rich and poor
End their days
In the manner of ungracious underlings.

You have seen
In lights and lanterns,
Snow that capped the scent on lilac boughs,
And honey in the dull dawn rise
And dust that showed
The shape of winter paths.

You have loved
And learnt its ways,
And felt the breathless spring and passed
All summer in a lover's daze,
And seen young laughter in the trees
Undone by pain
Slipping through the gilded leaves like rain.

You have seen
In lights and lanterns,
Man and ancient history remade,
And borne a man, been mad
For sanctuary in his one pair of arms,
You have seen
The dim lights in the evil shade
Brought down,
And summer all ablaze with dreams,
And death within the glade.

HILL AND VALE

Out of it all has come the myth of his laughter,
And the shape of the jury to be formed against us.

There is now no-one left, no-one sworn to follow
Under the hum-drum skies of the town, the
Ways of his quiet saints buried in the fields,
No-one is left to recover from the walls of his tomb
The lamp lit and lost and the laughter
That echoed all round.

Out of it all came the making of fellows bolder than I,
And some who died in humour and blessed all the long day,
And some who lived in the shadow of a vanished sun,
Who ascended slowly with the turn of the year,
Who were burnt and swallowed by the crowd.

Their laughter is not heard now,
The berry is the bush of the shrinking spring
And the bird along the stream the rare thing.

Their laughter has gone out of our wondering,
Such as we, who follow after, men for the light.
Dream dreams shyer than the truth
And live carefully through the trials of His death.

PSALM

All things are destroyed and pressed to oblivion,
All things and thoughts and half whispers,
Bursting speeches and trembling admittances,
And the speaker is destroyed
Either by the ill-wind or in the garrulous rain,
A creature drowning alone in the rain.

And places and the marks upon the places are destroyed,
Being made by those destroyed,
And those, uncertain of existence, who registered their
protest.

So shall the rivers dry that have no source for the summer,
The trees that have no roots to feel the damp earth,
And so shall wither
All hands that have no hands to reach for beauty,
To seize some avenue to beauty,
They shall perish in the hot weather with the thirst of living.

We, those who watch all things rise and crumble,
And live searching, not knowing for whom or what we
search,

We shall perish, you and I, in this mild weather,
In the spring or partial summer,
As lightning follows thunder, however weak the thunder,
however
Soft the rain.

All things and thoughts rise to the surface,
Sometimes composing much of the surface,
A look that tokens nothing but two eyes looking,
Or a word spoken

Least meaning those words unspoken that might be spoken,
For Time, of all things, is demolished by those uncertain of
Time.

Living that tomorrow may be only today
And life a boy's dream of immortality.

LEGEND IN SAND

Survey the not too critical tombs,
Which endless labour built for royal remains,
Where linger Cleopatra's eyes and Caesar's whims,
Where in the desert's sighs
Swing the camel's backs and thirsty palms,
Watched by faded eyes from the solemn Nile.

Grace they have, as evil as the lace of filthy robes,
In idle death the punctured Pharaohs rocked, caressed
By tideless shallows in the sand,
Till death was opened and the sun let in,
And dainty screams through centuries ignored,
Till jesting pirates climbed the cunning rooms
To snatch the fleshless garments from their kings,
To fill their bags with stones from royal shelves
And hasten legend to an unkempt doom.

Survey the face that loving leisure so prescribed,
Or love demanded from protesting faith,
Sphinx, ancient as our lust, faced to dawn,
Precious to the fatuous dream, or so conceived
That love should be defined in one loose grin that
Time has banished,
And steel sand sharpened to a sigh.
Survey the careful works of present men,
Charmed by the crumbling face of famous walls,
Where now they plan to keep their Pharaohs,
To preserve a monument
That here a shameless beauty blinded Roman sight
And held an eager heart awhile,
For men have mentioned Caesar with her name,
Whilst none have drawn her out to face the dreams of time,
Which daub chaste virtues on her common charms.

Survey these breaths of madness, laugh at this screen
 Of pyramids against the sky,
 Man has no recompense for smiles,
 The whispers of the kings and thieves
 That passed their own quick moments in this shade,
 Gather to shiver at the turning down of the sun,
 To chill at the thought of days dealt by their wisdom,
 Days harassed by their hands,
 Days with men chained to incredible stones,
 And bullocks bleeding on the shifting slopes,
 Days of fools maddened by love, of thrones laid on
 Magic steps, cleansed by a commoner's blood,
 Days when the river washed to the foot of these graves,
 And heard their whispers and saw their blood
 Respectfully staining the careless sand.

Survey this not undreamt of scene,
 Eye to magic eye,
 Difference there is none
 Between Pharaoh and made man,
 Cleopatra's eyes are not her own,
 But sand and sun
 Are as one.

NOTES FOR A PAUPER

(For Mother)

Shall I unlock the hours that heal her fate,
 Or stammer out the words that hold my heart,
 Shall I like this remember that soft face
 Or eyes that met that softness strangely most,
 Softer than snow,
 Though then I did not think like this.

Should I the least have noticed all the grace,
 Which now when one twelve-month is past
 Flutters like a fine bird over the bare trees,
 Brighter than blue finch,
 Though then I saw no grace I could have seen.

Death may have its pinions in the blundering ghost,
 But love like hers had leaves that lift our hope,
 Scattering the old tears in the ancient dust,
 As words warm in a wild breeze
 Whisper the wise words of death to us.

Like any eagle blessed with wings,
 Not one poor sparrow lighter than the air, she rose,
 Like any star sighting the maid moon,
 Though then the pain was weaker than the old wound,
 And the night as grey as fiddles in a cold room.

Should I have known, though early morning,
 That the silence fell
 As stolen silver gleams on falling snow,
 That not like a scream through the harsh fog howled
 Her love, her spring,
 But quietly through the calm mist ran,
 Gathering her soft symbols from the ablest storm.

Should I the weakest have foreseen
 Out of some beginning this end just as it could have been,
 As slight as a nightmare in the morning might have seemed,
 Should I have known
 That like a rose,
 She lingers in the garden till the worst wind blows.

Should I not weep that any deed was done,
 Startling the black sheep that never sleeps at home,
 That no death stunned the joy that should have come,
 Foolish as a son I felt no fear when left alone.

Should I alone not force the end that frees her love,
 Prattling a prayer or make a pass at death,
 Or could my life my pauper's love best use,
 To help me trudge to her by any road I choose.

END

It shall be the end of intolerable longing,
 The body towards land, towards the shore,
 It shall be the end of loving, the end of living,
 Between brother and sister there will be no memory,

It shall be the end of dreaming, the eyes open,
The heart uncertain.

It shall be the end of authority,
A fear removed of monuments,
Of those fiercest in the land of flames,
Forests on the deep sea's edge shall burn
And burst their bodies into air,
Spirit into light and light into everlasting fire.

It shall be the end of fear,
Of lives beyond one compass, outside hope,
The end of faith,
The end of prayers, of altars framed in wistful peace,
The end of kisses after dark,
And hands held tightly in the park.

It shall be the end of slothful spires,
And dreaming towers in quaking fields,
For on the shoulders of the wind shall run
Steeple and chancel and boastful cross,
All that love dreamed and saw begun,
All that dreams dared and left undone,
All that peace blamed but did not bless,
All that hope saw but saw no less,
These shall blow on the holy wind,
And shatter the fringe of the river's trees,
And sweep the meadows till the earth is sand,
And the end shall be
With the setting sun
Earth lost to man, man lost to heaven.

PASS DOWN LOW NOW, SUN

Pass down low now, sun,
Beneath the pinnacles of the day's fame,
And remember her name
Show her as one
Fiery as the dawn.

Pass down low now, sun,
Below the soft sea,
To laughter give a voice of radiancy,
And to me
Give warmth and to each lonely one.

Pass down low now, sun,
Bequeath the red sails a full net,
And to me all my memories
Caught by your death, as yet
Shadows in the clear skies.

Pass down low now, sun,
Be all I see, at death,
The water, the way she cried,
Be her name
When I remember the dead flame
And the way it died.

Silvia Dobson and W. E. R. Bell

SECULAR HYMN

Thou, in final groves abiding,
With your words our way be guiding
Through this darkness—stars of words
Light the path the earth affords.

Leaves of summers bound in gold
Line our walls till we are old;
Bards triumphant! Care bestow
On those militant below.

Fulfilled, glorious, gone before,
Thronging on the cloudy floor:
Milton, Marvell, Blake, and Donne
Bless the bed that we lie on.

FIFTH DIMENSION

Sound has more cadence
than fugue and arietta,
than symphony and serenade proclaim.

Sight tempts the eyes
to stranger sense than seeing,
where contour, silhouette, periphery
form zodiacs of visionary beasts
who shame mortality

Listen, look out,
lean down across the world!
Yesterday and tomorrow are twin thieves!

In the blood is a brittle wisdom
which snatches plumes
from the tail feathers of the infinite.

REMEMBER STANDING AT THE EDGE
OF LIFE . . .

Remember standing at the edge of life,
Which was a field, a toyshop, or a town,
Filled with enormous animals and constellations of flowers,

Bricks and balls and mysterious boxes,
Great red 'buses roaring up and down;
Where every stranger was a friendly giant,
And toothache or a bruised knee the only existing pain;
Remember, remember what you'll never know again.

Now there are many superior pleasures
And complex variations of pain,
The toys are dusty in the attic, and the fields
And towns, and the soldiers' scarlet coats are not the same;

Yet you cannot fail to remember
That childhood, everlasting in amber
—Beneath your daily gestures and visages
It whispers sometimes the needed answers
In its happy language.

AFTERNOON SCHOOL

Far far from here
These eyes
Reflecting still
Their images of endless fields and skies:
Were I to shout
They'd flash like birds from shot
With quick fear of a different world

This room begins the gloom
The entrance to the tunnel through their doom:
Learn here to shape the limbs
Over the future like a desk, to stoop
Under a low roof

A word would throw you back
Through banging doors to your huge air
To talk of bikes, ice-hockey, and the stars,
Your frank world without care,
Where war's a hard word
Chewed by sad parents at each evening meal

Commands like winter strike, and when they've fallen
Gloomy as winter birds you droop
Dully as birds in snow you drop
By the cold expanse of sheet, the day's trial,
You stare at paper,
Weary journey across the white
Your world shut out under the white
Which hides your grass and high branches

I can finger the word of release
Like the key to a cage,
But I remember a bird's eye
Watching me from a hedge,
Brighter than the berries,
And I could only watch,
Not reach inside the tension
Or they would fly, both bird and cage

Your eyes like birds in cages seem to peep
And flutter to be out
To light on leaves
Your eyes watch birds
They wheel around the branches
Then rest in leaves,
No rustle under the cool lids
Which smoothen light with peace
Like leaves

Now if I kept a crowd of swallows here
To talk and preach at six hours of the day
Who would not for a madman lock me away?

O throw the wings from windows to their plunge
and play!

DREAM I.

Floating in night, golden thighs in a green garden,
Black hair against my cheek, the scent of sleep
Under a sky of leaves and folded birds—
Turn together, oh pardon, please pardon
The thorned rose and the plucked words!

Do you know his name who watches over the wall
From his white saddle studded with old tears?
His horse is violent and rides him for a fall
Down by the broken tramway, where the barred cathedral
Leers like a sacked schoolmaster at pretty boys.

He has dropped a book behind you . . . Do not fear . . .
No, let me open it! Call him back!
But the hooves are thundering the houses down,
Rousing the carrion birds from their gorged sleeping:
Ah, we cannot see the page; we cannot read for weeping.

DRESS REHEARSAL, SPAIN, 1937

Tattered banners swing in the churches,
tombs are neat with ribbon and wreath.
Stone memorials cover the ruin of the corpses beneath.
Why is song dead?

Hungry heroes sing in the gutters,
Prisons gulp the valiant in years.
Ardour and urgency melt in a feverish welter of tears.
Where has hope gone?

Cut the thread!
Clean the stones!
Gather up the splintered bones!

Europe must in order be
for the final misery.

ALMS FOR OBLIVION

Toast then the dead, our kinsman and our peers,
who cross the sombre stream that lies ahead!

Alms for our friends and maybe for ourselves!
Abstraction curls fern-fronds across our fate.

Where ends security? Who dies to-night?
Is it too late to pray?

A toast, I say towards oblivion.

The tortured and the slain, the drowned and damned,
those who died quickly, those who lost their lives
in a slow agony, an ugly pain.

Bruised, burned, and mangled; shredded bone from bone,
dead, and again dead; bunched into Lethe
like sheep beneath an axe,
counted in nightmare sleep towards a sum of vindication.

Brief silence holds us, and the grief of years
whirls over centuries its faint, fastidious foliage.
Yet they know neither heartache nor fermenting tears.

Yet they have lost desire.
The hot ash and smouldering fire of love
has grown cold.

Alms for oblivion ?

Today we rob the dead, and lay out corpses neatly in array,
tier upon tier of gruesome carcasses, in foul decay most ripe.

Prise then the gun out of his frozen hands;
his fight is done, and if snow falls tonight
he'll gain a shift, a winding sheet, a grave.

But we in strife so insecure, so menaced,
seek frantically to save our fortitude.

A toast to life!
Say, 'Alms against oblivion.'

We cannot comprehend finality
and fear extinction that makes naught of pride;
that opens the wide gates of ruthlessness
to greet mortality.

THEY PLUCKED THE APPLE IN THE EARLY GARDEN

They plucked the apple in the early garden,
A seed fell from the core and grew a globe,
The first prize ticketed wonder of the universe,
And little they really thought to pray for pardon
As each year added glory to the growth,
Prophets and such were banished with a curse
To grumble in the wilderness, or worse;
And still all marvelled at the wondrous size . . .

The gardeners gathered in the yearly prize
And carefully tabulated all their knowledge,
Lecturing incessantly in every college
On gardens and the growth of human glory;
Until one autumn evening by decree
A great parade went marching off to see
This wonder so renowned in song and story,
And full of pride to have a world to grapple
Found a small, wizened, bitter cooking-apple.

AMBULANCE DRIVER

Cover me now with cobwebs and clemency.

The clear sky has stolen my sense:—
horizon after horizon,
wheat in vast green lakes,
sun that shakes the scent from lime flowers,
wind that closes the plain
to a snarling malison of dust.
I must forget.

The freight of the past is too heavy.

Movement had taken us
through glare of mid-day heat,
through thickets of cork trees,
through lonely villages
where peasants still beat their corn with flails,
where tanks clutter the ditches,
monsters out of tune
with the moon-eyed oxen
in the fields St. Francis blest.

From Bari to Benevento
 the mule carts impeded us.
 Clover swooned in placid crimson.
 Over the Apennines went clouds clenched to thunder.
 Under blown bridges
 lay derelict litter of war.
 Again and again we saw
 graves with wooden crosses;
 and the unknown dead, choir to uncertainty,
 caught and troubled our hearts.

Capua, Cassino, Frosinone.
 Now we are taught the agony, the deprivation.
 Only mountains hold tranquillity.
 Old towns are gone.
 We who came blithely from the south have found
 grotesque mounds of stone, where time could claim
 the same churches, barns and inns,
 farmsteads, fair mansions,

Road is to Rome.
 We are not pilgrims but somnambulists.
 St. Peter's dome is set in a pool of quiet,
 but we must pass the cool blond Tiber,
 down the straight convoy route, down the dark way,
 coil, loop and bend, stretching beyond the day
 towards night's mystery.

We drive to where the battle-line is set,
 to get torn men,
 to fetch shell splintered soldiers,
 to drag from hell of pain,
 those who may never love their youth again.

Cover me with a pall of insensibility,
 divest me of feeling.

The freight of the present is too heavy.
 I must forget.

THUNDERSTORM

The throb of engines in the sky
 has threatened us too long.
 Thunder, that was royal and wide,
 seems menace of gunfire.

Are we safe? Are we safe?
 Is the house down?

CHRISTMAS EVE

I do not think this night
 the roof will crash to crack my skull.

Long after mid-night, with the ghosts of mind
 I shall hold council,
 tied to throbbing thought,
 shackled by memory, unnerved by time.

War is the hearse we pull through the dark streets,
 plumed with dead-feathered-birds,
 blasted and stark.

War is the coffin and its piteous wreath,
 the clay upon our face, the gnawing worm.

'A child is born Peace upon earth . . .
 Good-will to men . . .'

In Springtime, with Christ risen,
 the Great Offensive will come.

DREAM VIII

December with Christmas holidays and trains
 Shakes the toy snowstorm in the globe of memory,
 And the empty child, vessel to hold all pains,
 Starts on his journey towards Gethsemene.

Wise men and rich from East or West who wander,
 Fabulous uncles with presents for all boys,
 O you'll preserve your skins from Herod's anger,
 Departing hurriedly, leaving your toys!

And the childrens' blood who will remember?
The lovely gifts exploded for years :
Born in a manger, born in December
Christmas in Europe is terror and tears.

TO NOEL, KILLED IN AN AIR-RAID

I had better have loved a flower
or a young larch tree.

—Her hair in the sunlight catches gold
and the curve of her cheek
is birds' flight suddenly stilled.

Stilled too
is her eyes' bright fervour,
and the glint of her hands
which wavered ever astray.—

No one can say
that in death she is not beautiful;

yet
I had better have loved
a flower or a tree.

THE END OF THE END OF THE END

Give me fruit
frosted on the bough,
and the scant northern weeds
that now unfold from sheafs ice-cold
to kiss the frozen air.

Give me pale rosebay spires
that mourn on ruined soil,
and bitter berries scarlet on the briars,
and blackthorn with its royal blossom gone
yet flaming still in every jagged spear.

Defeat is like discovery;
we sail
in a tossed ship
near to the tempest's heart,
to seek Elysium in vacuity
and find obliteration.

THE PATRIOTS

Are you sure you don't like this war,
are you sure you don't prolong it,
green, beady-eyed, bulging woman, avid for blood?

Your fingers grasping the page of atrocity stories
have turned into talons clutching the necks
of the white thirsty boys who die in the desert.

Ensconced behind barriers of trade and tradition,
the cotton-wool patriots sob out condolence
each time they read the casualty lists
or count out the victims of total warfare.

'Shocking,' they say, 'disgraceful, scandalous!'

you used to laugh at them, now blood
spurting from grievous wounds
writes question mark to all your promise.

'Shocking' has it.

CALCUTTA I.

Monsoon breeze scatters
Dust, illnesses, and rags;
Over Kidderpur Bridge mutters
The drab edges
Of the city's central mouth
Of business, whores, and bars;
Trams clank between bullocks
And sacred cows
At crossroads chew and drowse
Beside men without food or houses.

The tired, dust-filled eye
 Turned up to the great sky
 Sees only machines of pain flying,
 And back on the pavement finds
 Charts of the stars, spread on rags
 Before the verminous astrologers;
 And over all the carrion birds
 Watching the dying—
 Watching the old
 Who are having their futures foretold.

CALCUTTA II.

Diamond Harbour—dull with grease
 Choked with coal-dust, and hot skies roar
 And the stinking river
 With machinery of war,
 And the mind closes tight
 Round its private globe of light;
 Oily pools heavy with barges,
 Docks screaming with cranes,
 Dull,
 Dull pain . . .

Ah, but the ships, like lives
 Launched on desire, and my heart
 Starts on that imaginary voyage
 Towards the island of your heart,
 And fishes flicker beneath
 Like swimming wishes
 Hauled back from the brink of the withheld image
 On the cast line of thought;
 And even the absurd ducks and rubbish
 Bobbing on the surface are lent
 Some brightness of the far sea's element.

CALCUTTA III. Bow Bazar Street

What is your fancy?
 Do you wish to buy
 A roll of muslin, some opium, or a boy?
 Or a Persian girl packed nicely in a box?
 A monkey? A murder? Any unusual joy?

Do you wish to sell
 A friend? A bowl of goldfish? A match?
 A bundle of old newspapers, or your finger-nails?
 A ton of Turkish tobacco, or a watch?
 Come to me—I'll do anything for money:
 Money, money, sweeter than honey!

THE WINE OF THE SOUTH

Under the scent of roses
 lies a tawny threat,
 caught in the narrow streets
 as caged sunlight;
 violent behind bars of bright heat
 locked against quietude.

Oh soft white mules
 with velvet eyes,
 who carry the grapes to market.
 Will your foals, born in May,
 go garlanded with myrtle?

In the taverns
 wine is as sharp and cool
 as winter herbs,
 —but the beast is there:—
 caged in hot quartz,
 relaxed supine in pliancy.

I have seen his claws
 draw arabesques in flesh,
 with blood as token of defeat.

PROPHECY

Peace, when it comes
will silt the bloody rivers
with sand of clotted quiddity, with shale of scorn.

Torn threads of feeling
must go graft themselves on granite rock,
on snarling cactus trees.

Till reason is a desert and we lead
a child without anguish
to divine wells.

THE WAR WIDOW

What has gone, veracious face,
from your remembered grief?

Why does despair no longer whirl and spin
to brittle shape before your eyes?

Why has surprise suddenly caught you up
and set your mouth, smiling, to kisses?

—Yet no one there —
Why this, with no one there?

VENUS IN SCORPIO

When grief comes dressed as a bride,
we tie roses with ribbons.

Wide is the world which crashes
on either side of the crimson carpet.

Brief is the song,
long is the night

when grief comes dressed in white,
like a bride.

KISSING YOU WHEN YOU WERE ASLEEP

It's here I'd choose to die, and my last breath
You'd draw between your lips, and after death
You'd bathe my limbs and comb my hair, and weep
An hour or so, and dry your eyes and sleep;
Dreaming you'd turn towards me, but in vain;
And then the dawn would filter through again.

I hope you'd lock the door and cut my heart
Gently away and stitch up every part,
Then 'phone the funeral men and tell my friends
And make them bury me where the AIn bends
Out from the hills at home . . . But that you'd stay
And keep my heart from grieving, all that day.

You'd know the kind of jar; I think you'd choose
A shapelier one than is in common use
To stand upon your mantle-piece and be
An everlasting lesson without fee,
You'd soon be expert—all those poems and letters
And now the thing itself, what could be better?

Then some day all alone you'd go and stand
Beside my grave, up in Northumberland,
And plant some flowers as we said one day,
Sweet-peas I'd like— and then you'd go away
And hurry back to Edinburgh by evening
And close your curtains just as light was leaving.

Perhaps you'd be a heart specialist, with knowledge
Famous throughout the world, and every college
Would clamour for your lectures and advice;
Perhaps one day you'd win the Nobel Prize;
And then I hope that everywhere you went
I'd go, to illustrate your argument.

"Tell us about the heart," the class would say:
I hope they'd sometimes see you turn away
And wipe your glasses, maybe; you'd recall
A day in Kensington or at St. Paul's,
"I love this heart," you'd murmur, and my jar
Would seem a vase where all our roses were.

HARPOON

The huge whale of circumstance
heaves bloody gills,
curdling salt water with refulgent gore,
till more than half the world
clots and congeals,
and only dreams can lie
tranquil,
tracing icebergs and the backs of seals,
cresting moon-splintered waves beneath chill sky.

Where is reality?
Who seeks to-night
truth and the core of sense and reason's wheel,
a zodiac of planned mythology,
a maze whose heart no minotaur can find?

Part of myself has died!
Have you such scorn to pour upon conceit
that you can steal bright wit and peace of mind,
persistence, focus, vigour, flexibility,
a bit to curb your pride?

The huge whale of circumstance
heaves bloody gills;
Why did you plunge your harpoon in the poor brute's eye?
There is tact even in whale-fishing.

DRAGON'S TEETH

If I give you my dragon's teeth of feeling
you may drive them to slavery.
If I plant them myself,
they will rise up as armed men.

A host, a furious phlanx
to make war on you,
to coerce, mock, destroy.

Do not ever again tell me Love is blind.
He has the most outrageous insight,

the most cruel reason.
He knows the breadth and depth of viciousness,
with all the vices at his finger-tips.

Armed men or slaves?
Your will or mine?

Anger has thunder-bolts to toss at fools,
but Sentiment wears hob-nails on his shoes.

If I give you my dragon's teeth of feeling
you will snare them to slavery.
If I plant them myself
they will save me from perfidy.

A ROOM FOR MONICA

With high white walls whispers write peace upon,
Stars dusted on a roof of clouds and glass,
And curtains closed on the pitiful streets of Europe
Is the fantasy of my hermit's image,
Only, embraced and worshipped, not resisted:
There shall be no exorcism by prayer and beads,
For I see us in that room speaking evening's language,
And your healing hands open our sides like books, to read
The history of our hearts, under one low lamp lit;
And then for rest,
A pillow with your dark hair over it.

TIME AWAY

Afterwards, when this is long ago,
I shall remember serenity,
in quiet cadence
lapping against the walls of centuries
to unleash ghosts.

Now in the present
hooves of time beat fiercely,
bruising the heart that cries aloud for comfort.

We, ourselves, frail in actuality,
are trampled underfoot.

AT INVERAREY

Bronze is the sky
and dusk makes purple the air.

Sea-gulls fly
towards a sun that has set.

Come home into the dark house
and let the night take care of itself.

DREAM VII

O where are you going to, climbing those stairs,
Son of my heart, in a future evening?
There things go "thump," and nobody dares
To ascend alone or soon they're grieving.

Listen! The wind in the chimney howling!
Stay in the firelight, safe and warm;
Out on the moor the ghosts are growling,
Curtains are closed and you're safe from harm.

Here in this room, at our heart's centre
Sit on my knee or sprawl on the floor:
We two are lucky—no other may enter
Her evening heart by our secret door.

THE HOUSEBREAKER

Love has no pride
but seeps between the dusty floorboards and the cracks of
walls,
constant as water, penitent as tears,
to wash the feet of passionate regret,
to quench the thirst of pain.

Thousands of shells, then,
thousands of sea-anemones,
star-fish, a rain of coral and a shower of sand,
a wreath of topaz weed, a shoal of fish.

The sea that was my love, that was my tears
has so much pride that stars are gulped to gloom.
Whirlpools of water overwhelm the house
and wash regret away.

TO THE SPHINX

I am cut down.

Love had sprung up,
a field of corn,
and now,

before harvest, before dawn,
in the darkest hour,
with sickle and with sharpest scythe,

I am cut down.

CELESTIAL DECEPTION

Love's candles are put out
and one by one,
the acolytes of passion
pass to sleep.

If you could keep one taper flame alight,
we should not need to stumble,
we might go
where the slow cavalcade of young desires
journey to bliss.

One kiss upon the eyelids,
one caress,
and loveliness flames bright on every tree.

Blinded by ecstasy, we do not see
Love's candles are put out.

TO AN OLD LADY

To keep away,
 Away from those who hoard my earlier life,
 Away from the rooms of fear warm with sighs,
 From the period greeting and reminiscence,
 The bent man stopping me in the street, saying,
 "You walk like your father,"
 The old housekeeper saying,
 "You have your mother's eyes."

To keep away,
 Away from the spurious peace that is a needle,
 Away from the invitation to stay for the night,
 From the cracked relationships and the faded photographs,
 She meeting me in the street, saying,
 "It's the first time we've met since that evening at Roughlee,
 You're quite a stranger now."

To pay a visit there
 Would be like climbing to your room,
 You who are still warm,
 You'd switch on charm,
 Thinking you knew why I'd come.

But I'd refuse a chair,
 Wanting only to see you well,
 You whom I love still
 Across your old guile,
 All you try to make me feel.

To pay a visit there,
 Rejecting all offered and shown,
 Curve under hill and river
 Winding dark and slow
 Loved view in high window . . .

And I'd refuse to rest,
 Watching that treacherous, cork-soft hand
 That hides a needle
 To pierce my flesh with peace.

FAINT WISDOM

We bend the branch and ask too much of sweetness:—
 the bough leaps back and blossom spills around.
 So are we crowned by blossom,
 so are we blinded by falling petals
 while malign twigs lash,
 and stamens splash to earth, luciferous,
 and leaves fall like green rain.

The birth of caution should come after learning,
 and yearning tire when hopes have been in vain.
 Yet Blossom trees are rare, and if again
 we bend the bough and ask too much of sweetness,
 we can but be blinded by golden rain of stamens
 and by cruel twigs lashed.

For blossom scent is ours,
 and fallen flowers, and much, so much of sweetness.

TO SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

The quiet woman
 caught thoughts with a fishing rod
 and baked them with the bread of comprehension.

You and I make cold, articulate conversation
 but she can feed five thousand.

AGAINST REALITY, SPEAKS YOUTH

"Older than honour is the mind's unreason.
 In turbulent treason, our dreams swoop down.

Grown out of acorn shells and curved moss roots,
 this fancy shoots to giant dragon flowers.

Hours out of time are carved in mystic stone
 to immortality, unknown, unthought,
 caught in the sombre crown of destiny."

AND THE SAGE REPLIES:—

Believe, my child, that the themes you love have fidelity.

Would the grass grow even so high
if it sought not the sun's fertility?

Would rivers flow seawards through mountains?
Or swallows fly south from the snow?

Go your way and lose grief, destroy cynicism.
Wonder and joy are still to be heard
as notes of pure magic.

One grass blade snaps in the beak of a bird
yet the tramp of the herd
has not stricken the turf of the hill.

VINDICATION

We suffer because of beauty
as the wind's breath
shivers the grasses
and gives them no rest.

We cry out because of loveliness
as the wave's weep
under the ocean's
rhythmic beat.

We build because of anguish,
a lithe spire
mirage to the memory
of lost desire.

THE SILVER BIRCHES . . .

The silver birches
Hesitating between earth and air
Delicate swirls of smoke
From flameless fires
Under the threatening moor.

O beware
The bursting flame
The moor's rising

Beware of those whose lives
By wrongs like flames
And poverty like stone
Tempered in woes
Are beaten into blades
And wait to strike

Springing like grass
Through grass in finished roads
Time wind and seeds
An army breeds.

BEDRAGGLED PHOENIX

The palms of hands unknissed have nail wounds.
Keep pace with recompense and let me go.
Surely I burn enough to be a phoenix bird,
a resurrection?
For if you show compassion, I can rise
from ash of indifference,
from frigid languishment,
into some brighter segment of the skies.

The poignancy of grief has solace
at the heart's core where silence stays to heal.
Surely you care enough to build a funeral pyre,
to bring an offering?
For if you bear no malice, I can speed
from abject self-abasement,
from dreary surrender,
from graceless violation of my need.

ADVERSE ASPECTS

Scarecrow, among the vines,
your clamour cannot keep the birds
from building in your beard.

Yet
could you bleed,
this whole hillside
would wither with your anguish!

Scarecrow, who guards the corn.
I have abandoned grief.

Each leaf
is wet with rain;
each wheat ear glows
with tender dew.
Each poppy head
knows how to greet
the brief sun
and the briefer rainbow.

I must go greet tomorrow
now today
stands gaunt and heartless,
in the sodden field,
Scarecrow to all the winds.

SONNET

The world wins its flashy initial victory,
Driving its metal over books and hearts;
Alas for the weak whose only church is machinery,
Who wonderingly mumble that sombre breviary!
Mounting the newest marvel with devout humility!
They should quarter the priest and cut off his parts . . .
But that duped congregation is nearing the end:
Who rides a tiger can never descend.

Alas for the weak, who inherit less
Than we had at the start, under our tree;
How holy is patience in darkness, we
Shall pass by all the finished factories
To heal and love and write a world to read
In an element of endless leaves and summer.

THRESHOLD

I am no longer inconsequent
for I have found comfort
in my own skill and dexterity,
my own wisdom.

Wrapped in warmth,
I shall not feel cold again;
never starve, never die of thirst,
never throw myself down.

—Youth went out with the whirlwind
to drown himself in a deep pool.—

But I am locked in life
and cannot escape.

WHEN ALL'S POTENTIAL, NOTHING DONE . .

When all's potential, nothing done,
All errors through the senses run,
Still pondering in a chair
The poise that's born in air.

These limbs were free and learnt to move
Through complex dance and easy groove,
Unthinking served the turn,
Though never taught to learn.

Now all's in doubt, the dubious eye
Suspects in clearest truth a lie,
Within the purest light
A single, perfect night.

Thought's but a jelly and the shell
That holds it firm the walls of hell,
There grows within our fear,
The bitter pearl, the tear.

So dry upon a future shore
Shall lie the husk of what we were,
While bright on breast or hand
The dear disease we planned.

Mark Holloway

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

What shall it profit you and me
To learn the sun's candlepower
Or the speed of light? What are scientists
But human fools when lightning slays a tree
And lays it at their yokel feet, O where
Is the sun's beat in their cold-fingered look?

In frigid observatories astronomers
Set down the stars and docket every comet
In a book. This spidery symbol
On the fly-walked page is Venus
Caught to earth and laid by a clerk's hand
On this white sheet, colder than death.

Science has shown me like Mephistopheles
To Faust, pleasures which turn to dust;
It has shown me a robot's world.
Along its railroads of reason I have found
The lust in the dark, the lost hunger
And the ineffective visions of the blind.

While magicians hide the secret of beauty
In a mathematical tag, our hearts
Like wounded birds, failing and falling
Drop to a slow death. Let us find
Our own sun with the naked eye
And spend life's hour on his golden sands.

Let us give Venus up to eternity
That we may know those visions in the sky
As sea knows moon, untutored
And unquestioning. Let us touch time again
Through a thousand purgatorial years
And spin our five senses into the web of stars.

ALL CLEAR

The dome-cracked, doom-laden night
Retracts; dawn's blue first light unfires
The fires of night; ruins reveal their shape;
Tired as the firemen's eyes, dust-laden walls
Regard the naked site; raw as their hands
Are the skinned roofs of a street.
Day lightly floats to earth, the town respires, birds sing;
Spires like pencils write across the sky
History older than bombs can try—
This is the spring of another twenty-four-hour year.

TWO LOVERS IN AN UNDERGROUND SHELTER : LONDON 1940

Of this new Pompeii and its living dead
Holding their tired heads above these sad ashes,
Of minds fused into a creeping lava, numbed
And dumb, inviting death like a grisly dancing partner
To their lives; of these they are not part,
But lie here in this corner with a new world between them
And in their eyes.

As the peach is sweetened by the summer sun
And its clinging flesh binds to its secret stone,
So she, as her dawdling fingers find his face
And all its hidden valleys, stares so intent
Into his eyes, she must read all the heavens there
And find it strange indeed to be a ring round Saturn
Circling slowly.

The old world hangs on the cross above
But here under the battled earth he lies
Like Christ in the tomb, his heart afire with new life
And in his eyes the light the first world saw
The moment of its dawning. The spark of love
Survives these ashes, and here in this corner
A new planet swims.

TO A VISITOR FROM THE TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY

You have sailed into this dead sea incredulous
Appalled by the mouldering walls
Of life, the wizened brains, you have shuddered
At the knife's indriven edge, but tried
To end our suicide, amputate dead limbs
Cauterize our body's rot, clean it white
As the coming tide.

Under the shroud of living you have crept
With microscopes for eyes; you have learnt the ways
Of our present death. You have lain
With the whole world, holding its ebbing pulse
And the skein of its taut nerves;
You have stolen along the chambers of its heart
And paced its brain.

You are Columbus brought back to Spain
Shackled by fools with death's dust in their eyes
And pieces of gold knocking under their ribs;
You will not be tried, but sold
In ignorance. While your far-distant land
Is ravished, they will change your heart
For ingots of gold.

They will say you told a mad tale
And tried to live in a Utopian dream,
Will scorn your ideals but swarm on that land
Like vermin. I can already hear the excited feet
And the wild cries of men escaping from men
Running heedless and headlong
Past your true heart's beat.

TO A GIRL IN OCCUPIED FRANCE

I doubt if we could weave to-day
Along some sunlit lazy street
The faultless, magically gay
Choreography which lovers feet
Instinctively make. Perhaps this power
Which brought us mystery now may,

At that conspiratorial hour
Of darkfall when the light of day
Is drawn beneath the heaven's line,
When soft and full the pale moonshine
Creates a dream within a dream,
Make love, and lovers, shadows seem.

So then, my heart, we'll shadows be
Until the sun comes up again
And the world forgets its idiocy
And I, like that melancholic Dane
Who found that love sometimes may die
And, overcome, let poison populate
Her veins, and stain the crystal of her eye
Until the whole world spins with hate,
Will wait for my Ophelia floating down
The stream of time towards that town
We knew so well, where lovers soon
Shall move again beneath the moon.

TO A FRIEND IN AMERICA

What is it taught your eyes
To well up into my veins
And break out like a flower,
To hold the whole world still
And halt that power
Which strides among the stars?

If I were now mirrored
In those twin grey pools
The idiot clown in my head
Would catch in his intricate net
My swimming thoughts
And bring them to the hot sands of my heart,

But because you are far away
I have outgrown the clown,
Am one with the still world you hush,
And your two wells,
Bell clear, cool my heart
And the longing there.

TO E.B.McC.

My mind-enveloped fingers will not bend
To the heart's word, nor memory of love
Bring back the substance of its images.
O hands could you but touch these mental shapes,
These unsubstantial pageants of the mind
Or cross these wintry war-time centuries
To hold again that splendid minute
Eternity's long lost earthly visit.

O eyes take on that everlasting night
In which the blind touch flesh and blood again;
Becalm the fevered fingers of the mind
With those soft peaches and alabaster hands,
Autumnal waterfall of auburn hair;
Put off the stark demeanour of to-day
And in this all-revealing loss of sight
Wake to love's ever returning morning.

AN OLD MAN REMEMBERS HIS YOUTH

The thought of love to an old man
Is the river's rich-pastured source
Brought to the salt and sandy sea's edge
Of time. Swiftly the years flow
Without ebb, and all that the old shall know
Of youth is perfume of blossoms idly caught
By moving waters. The same moon's light
By which I lay in the rich grass
Now finds these dry and aching sands
Which lie by the edge of an endless sea.
That time is gone when my heart leapt
Or my feet moved to a fiddler's tune
And my heart is an old ailing swan
Crossing the winter sky on listless wings
To deep night-ridden moonlit pools
Where waterlilies undulate their petal's lips
And form against the water's side
The thought of love, the thought of love.

AN OLD MAN PHILOSOPHISES

An old man in the book-filled room
Through sunlit passages of love meanders
This winter night. Though faded
On the yellowing sheets, the bloom
Of written love, like pot-pourri,
Has multiplied its fragrance.

The door is locked, and locked beyond it
All present cares, all glad moments unfulfilled
Of past imagining. Locked in his heart,
And in these time-born words, dreams for a moment live.

Was it I whom that tempestuous Aphrodite
Passionately loved? These brittle-fingered hands
Belle the possibility that through a summer's length
They held her close. Yet it is stranger that they turned
away
Towards autumnal marriage, in whose bed
Care was for the first time conceived?

Sad is the age-old theme, the oft-repeated
Platitudinous illusion of a young man's dream.
Should I then unlock the door, let in to-day,
Throw yesterday upon the fire, and take to-morrow's chance?
No choice remains. These letters
Are to-day, to-morrow and yesterday; as my blood thins
Towards death, so their ink fades; feebly my fingers
Flutter among memories of their former strength.

THE CITY SAILOR'S DIRGE

Let us sit down and talk of failures
Of creatures crawling under burdens
The sea of sorrow's sailors
Etching lonely charts of boredom
Splicing love-knots with the keepers
Of the watch of whoredom.

Many a pink and golden mist
Embezzled by the fire of wishes
Shall mould the carpet-staring guest
To gobble up dank alley kisses
And hang his raincoat on a lust
If his pass-book pleases.

The spring uncoiled for action
Waits upon the pleasures of a clod
As flesh and blood and money sates
Its vengeance on a harsh sea-bed;
The king of boredom's master mates
At the tall masthead.

These are the dudgeon-dusted days
Sad lyrics of the much accosted;
The city sailor's sunset lies
Embedded in these breasts of lead;
These are the days shall steal his eyes
And darken pleasures bed.

ON A YOUNG MAN DROWNED IN THE THAMES

Widowed like an autumn willow
By death's chill breeze shaking green tears
From her eyes, the young man's lover weeps
By the river's edge. Into his ear
She would breathe new life, but like ivory
He lies, as a swan might, had it fallen there.

River clay lies matted in his hair
From the plummet dive; wild staring eyes
From their lead-hued lids beseech the skies
To banish visions of dead men and bones
And darkest night among the weeds and stones.

HEARING OF A SUICIDE

The birds wheel no more
Nor turn to the south
Free migrators of the air
And you in your tight sphere
Have always in your mouth
The tang of iron, the clotted gore.

If you held your life in your hand
Like a mirror reflecting a barren land
And dashed it in shivers on the ground
No one should wonder at it
Or blame you, but credit
The reckless standard of your merit.

When they took what liberty you had
You took your life, not proof
Against the coldness of war
And the sun lightens no more
Man's heart, but hangs aloof
Cold as a critic, and sad.

SIMPLE SIMON'S SONG

Oh, for the days when birds wore spats
And babes were begotten on cokernut mats,
Oh, for the glorious land of the free
Where women wear nothing above the knee,
With a hey nonny no and a sickening jerk,
Why in the hell should anyone work?

Où sont les neiges de yesteryear,
The dodo, the yak and the stuffed polar bear?
Gone with the wind and the rain and all that
And the dust on the band of a mauve bowler hat
To the third floor back of a boarding house
With the little old woman who looks like a mouse.

Oh give me, oh give me a fruit machine
And the girl on the corner shall be my queen;
But give me, but give me a football pool
And she shall go dressed in satin and tulle;
But he who works for a monocled thug
Is better nor worse than a bloodstained mug.

Why should I work and why should I toil,
And why should I mickle and muckle and moil,
And why should I live on the Highgate line
In order to get to the office by nine;
And why to the power of the ultimate why
Should I work at all, or live, or die?

TRAIN SCENE

Years as the train wheels roll
Cover the face which care has lined,
Engraving deeper on that mind
Channels of fruitless toil.

Toy with your crossword puzzle, manikin,
For this is a crossword puzzle time
Of ups and downs that lead nowhere,
In which the circumspect may move
Carefully from square to square.

A clue, a word, a cross, a frown,
Looking obliquely and writing down
Complex details of a lost love,
Striving to make the puzzle complete—
And then, poor manikin, where will you move?

TO THE THAMES

Wind slowly down the hills
Licking the roots of willows;
Wander lazily up backwaters
Meander in cool meadows.

Empires and emperor's bones
And the dust of kings
Lie restless in your depth
No more to you than stones.

Man stretched his arm
And down your ragged length
Built bridges, locks and weirs
But never tamed your strength.

Ripple upon ripple
Generation upon generation
Man is suckled, is torn
From time's nipple;

His revolutions fail their promise
And you have seen his to-morrows
Become yesterdays
With all their sorrows;

You have seen in his heart
The violence he has nourished
For creeds you knew would die
And you have smiled apart.

Wind slowly down the hills
Licking the roots of willows;
Wander lazily up backwaters
Meander in cool meadows.

OLD SALT

When finally land-bound
He who had wandered in alien seas
Crossed many harbour bars
Stepped lightly on many shores,
Would writhe in an armchair,
Rise, spin the globe to Cathay seas,
Point split finger-nails at Wei-hei-wei,
Shanghai and Singapore, stand
At the garden's edge as on the bridge,
Take mental angles of the sun
Or try in a sea-breeze the salt tang;
Run like a dog before the storm
Sniffing the windward, alive air;
Talk barques and brigantines, buy
Twist in sea-girt pubs,

Blow lightly up to shapely girls
And talk of the Cutty Sark, the helm,
The still, star-guiding night;
Describe with zephyr voice
The blossom-heavy Inland Sea,
Or sound in shrill discordant tones
The cries of doomed men—with rolling eyes
And frantic hands he would bring jib,
Mainmast, foretop and mizzen crashing,
Stave in the hold, fling dozens overboard,
And climb with six survivors
Breathless, on a rock.

WISDOM

Could I set down this data and that trait
Epitomise the whole majestical array
Of present knowledge, claim my birth
Had heralded the wisest man on earth,
Then I were sad as those museum men
Whose love is trapped in a fountain-pen.

But if I knew where true contentment lay
Or knew what destiny must link the sky
With disregarding man, could live one day
As though I did not know I had to die
Then I were wise as children are
Who run to catch a falling star.

FIRST FEAR

My horizon was cut like ice
The space within was freedom;
Crawling on buckled legs
Unsteady with carelessness
I was so wise with innocence
I never knew the moon.

Between the parted curtains in her room
My mother showed me the moon
And not even her breast's warmth
Could soften the hard chill
Nor her kisses quell the doubt
Which lay with me in bed.

My horizon fell apart
And I ran panicking for freedom
Harnessed by this cold dread,
Afraid of the world and for it,
And in my head I beat about
Like the endless sea.

TO A NEWBORN BABY—SEPTEMBER, 1944

If you had been born on a happier morning
Only the leaves would now be falling
But guns replied to your first cry
And about the earth wherever men go
They fall to that rending echo
Announcing a major and minor tragedy.

Yet tragedy yours may not be
For although thousands die hungry
There is greater famine than want of bread
And in your wise beyond wisdom head
I think you know that it is love, are love,
And the first motions of the winging dove.

THE CRY

Her husband away, her child at home in bed
The political girl has gone to her secret meeting.

Must you intrigue with a new love? Must your agendas,
Your memoranda, your resolutions fill
The night hours? Is it better so to leave
Rapture for the political future?
The answer is in your daughter's cry
Which fills the empty house with memory
Of the last bird of summer bewailing winter's advent.

I know your intentions;
Your pockets are filled with spring seed,
Ceres in the night sowing a new life
For her daughter's generation. What are her cries
To the great cry torn out of Europe, out of
These darkened days?

What are all cries
But lamentation of sunset in the heart
And in the skies?

The cry will outlast us all;
When you are forty and the world is changed
Your daughter's daughter will cry at night,
Will rehearse laughter for the spring's
Ripe repetition, and I shall measure the new world
In brimming hearts and tear-filled eyes.

Is it not enough to have embraced at once
Two loves, two hemispheres, one world
Conjunctive in your circling arms? Must you
Stride out in the night to set new meteors
In violent flight?

They are but bird's wings
In the firmament through which the moon
Throws legends of unchanging change, hell
And heaven inextricably woven in head and heart.

As your purposeful footsteps fall into night,
Silence, my heart sinks, but my head knows
You are right; the distance to your meeting
Cannot be measured by a child's cry, or by
My time-wandering, contemplative heart.
The heart of the world moves with you, world
With an end, world with an endless pain
Which I accept, which you may change,
But range as your mind may, will never conquer.
As impossible as sun without rain, wrong without right,
Would be her smile without her cry, who cries to-night.

ROGER BURFORD

Roger Burford began to be interested in the cinema when he was at Cambridge (1926) and from 1928 till the war was a professional script-writer, usually under contract to a film studio.

Between 1932 and 1936 he wrote six detective novels under the name of *Roger East* and three in collaboration with Oswald Blakeston under the joint pseudonym of *Simon*. In 1941 he joined the Films Division of the Ministry of Information as script editor, and in 1943 he was sent to Moscow as films representative. He spent two years there. Some sporadic literary work, other than films and detective novels, has appeared from time to time, the most notable being *Poems and Documents* (White and White: 1936). The justification for this book, he said at the time, was not in the quality of the poetry. He regarded it as a case-book, convenient because it was possible to print all his slight output of poetry for ten years. The 'documents' were suggestive deductions from the poems, aided by reflection, of his contemporary attitudes to the function of the artist —attitudes which he traced to the pressures of society.

For the present publication he has collected his work for the following nine or ten years. It is significant perhaps that the 'documents' which go with it are less personal, though they contain clues, and more dogmatic.

OSWELL BLAKESTON
MAX CHAPMAN

Oswald Blakeston's poems are: "The Arrogant Man," "Spectator," "Anti-Freud," "Problem," "The Enemy," "This Machine Age," "Good News For Slow Travellers," "Your Name," "Securitati Perpetuae," "Memo," "Black Out," "Pleasure Cruise," "String Quartet," "Man and Beast," "Contentment," "No Place Like Home," "Gipsy," "Sun In The South," "In Secret," "Fair Enough," "Central Heat," "Still Life," "Country Shot," "Cigarette," "Last Day," "Contrast," "Little Saga," "Winter Sowing," "Tryst," "How It Got There," "On Sunday," "Colour Note," "The Glove Of Skin," "Cri de Coeur," "Progress," "Innocence."

Max Chapman's poems are: "Corybantic," "Skin Tides," "The Veins Of Love," "Night Fruit," "As The Day Is," "Grotto," "Spring," "Novice," "Siamese Cat," "Cat," "Slight Torso," "Country At Spring," "Thumbnail," "As The Heart Is," "Change Of Heart," "Poem," "Confessional."

Oswald Blakeston has written criticism and fiction for various publications and several books including *Death While Swimming*, a poem illustrated by Len Lye. Other poems in: *Caravel*, *Delta*, *The Literary Review*, *Programme*, *New Oxford Outlook*, *The Twentieth Century*, *Phoebus Calling*, *Proems*, etc. Verse collected here has appeared in: *The New English Weekly*, *Life And Letters*, *The Westminster Magazine*, *New Vision*, Nancy Cunard's *Poems For France*, Harry Roskolenko's *Exiles' Anthology*, *The Bookman*, *Seed*. Several poems are printed for the first time.

Max Chapman is a painter who writes occasional verse. He has exhibited pictures in London, Spain, Cornwall, both in one-man shows and group exhibitions. Poems printed in *Now* and *The New English Weekly*. Several poems printed here for the first time.

PETER CHILVERS.

Peter Chilvers is a young poet who has only published two poems: one in *Now* and one in *GEN*.

SILVIA DOBSON
W. E. R. BELL

Silvia Dobson's poems are: "Fifth Dimension," "Dress Rehearsal, Spain, 1937," "Alms For Oblivion," "Ambulance Driver," "Thunderstorm," "Christmas Eve," "To Noel, Killed In An Air-raid," "The End Of The End Of The End," "The Patriots," "The Wine Of The South," "Prophecy," "The War Widow," "Venus In Scorpio," "Harpoon," "Dragon's Teeth," "Time Away," "At Inverarey," "The Housebreaker," "To

The Sphinx," "Celestial Deception," "Faint Wisdom,"
"To Sylvia Townsend Warner," "Against Reality,"
Speaks Youth. And The Sage Replies," "Vindication,"
"Bedraggled Phoenix," "Adverse Aspects," "Threshold."
W. E. R. Bell's poems are: "Secular Hymn," "Remember
Standing At The Edge Of Life," "Afternoon School,"
"Dream 1," "They Plucked The Apple In The Early
Garden," "Dream 8," "Calcutta 1," "Calcutta 2,"
Calcutta 3," "Kissing You When You Were Asleep,"
"A Room For Monica," "Dream 7," "To An Old Lady,"
"The Silver Birches," "Sonnet," "When All's Potential,
Nothing Done."

Silvia Dobson is the author of *The Happy Philistine*, a novel
which had a succès d'estime. This is the first collection of
her poems.

W. E. R. Bell is a new poet.

MARK HOLLOWAY

This is the first time Mark Holloway has collected his
poems. His work has appeared in: *Poets Of Tomorrow—*
11 (Hogarth), *Little Reviews Anthology*, 1945, *New Road*,
1943, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetry Folios*, *Modern Reading*,
Gangrel, *Cambridge Front*, *Outlook*. Twelve of the poems
in the present selection are printed for the first time.



